

TITLE

A Dialogue on Addressing Environmental Justice and Health Disparities in EPHT Programs

THEME

Disseminate Credible Information to Guide Policy, Practice and Other Actions to Improve the Nation's Health

KEYWORDS

communities, databases, environmental justice, health disparities

BACKGROUND

Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) can be a valuable tool for supporting efforts towards environmental justice. The focus of environmental justice is the widely documented phenomenon that more environmental hazards are found in neighborhoods of racial and ethnic minorities and low-income populations. This proximity to environmental hazards may make it more likely that people in these communities will have increased exposures to hazardous substances, as well as related increased health risks. Evidence of chronic disease disparities between these and more advantaged populations has also been documented. Only in certain select circumstances can the connection be made between health outcomes and environmental hazards or exposures. By linking data on environmental hazards, exposures and health outcomes in a particular geographic area and over time, EPHT can be a valuable tool for identifying community-specific information to identify health disparities and support environmental justice efforts.

OBJECTIVE(S)

1) To share how some EPHT grantees are addressing issues of environmental justice in their projects; 2) To initiate dialogue among all session participants around ways in which environmental justice concerns can be incorporated into EPHT.

METHOD(S)

Representatives from six EPHT programs (California, Houston, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New Jersey) will form a panel for initial discussion of efforts to understand and address environmental justice and health disparities within EPHT. Oregon EPHT will provide background and facilitate discussion. Discussion topics include: 1) Efforts to involve environmental justice stakeholders and to learn about their needs and perspectives; 2) Developing and presenting environment and health environmental justice indicators in order to improve the level of dialogue with the community and others; 3) How tracking can focus local health departments to address chronic disease disparities; 4) Addressing issues of poverty, degraded housing and health in a disadvantaged area; 5) The ability to collect neighborhood level data so that environmental justice concerns and health disparities can be identified.

The discussion will then be opened and session participants will be invited to share their own experiences, questions, barriers or lessons learned in trying to identify and involve questions of environmental justice and health disparities in their programs.

RESULT(S)

Many EPHT programs are working on projects involving these issues; others would like to but have not yet done so. This dialogue will bring the issues of environmental justice and health disparities to the table and allow grantees to learn from each other in order to incorporate these important issues in both planning and implementation. Participants will shape a plan for continuation of this dialogue.

DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATION(S)

By addressing these issues now, EPHT programs can help ensure that local underserved communities are accurately identified; that EPHT successfully inspires collaboration with community partners; and that databases will include information necessary to identify areas of environmental justice concerns or health disparities.

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